

[JOIN OUR MAILING LIST](#)
[About Us](#) | [DONATE](#) | [Blog](#) | [Mobile App](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Mexico Website \(in Spanish\)](#)

REGIONS

ISSUES


[Reports](#) | [Programs](#) | [Initiatives](#) | [News](#) | [Experts](#) | [Events](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Donate](#)

## FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

2

## Ethiopia

[Ethiopia](#) | [Freedom in the World 2014](#) | [2014](#)

## OVERVIEW:

Despite a relatively smooth political transition following the 2012 death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian government in 2013 continued harassing and imprisoning political opponents, journalists, and the country's Muslim population under Meles's successor, Hailemariam Desalegn of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

Tensions with Eritrea showed signs of easing in 2013, after Ethiopia announced a willingness to hold peace talks. Though no formal dialogues were held, domestic and regional developments suggested a possible movement toward normalization of relations. Ethiopian troops had carried out a series of incursions into Eritrea in 2012—the first since the end of the war in 2000—reportedly in pursuit of rebels responsible for kidnapping a group of foreign tourists in Ethiopia's Afar region.

Violence resumed in Ethiopia's Ogaden region in 2013 after talks failed between the government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), a separatist group that has fought for independence since 1991. Talks between the government and the ONLF had been convened in Kenya but broke down in 2012 without agreement. In October 2013, the ONLF conducted a series of attacks against Ethiopian military posts that resulted in the deaths of 24 Ethiopian soldiers.

Ethiopia ranked 33 out of 52 countries surveyed in the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance, below average on the continent and among the bottom in the East Africa region. The country's modest gains in the index are largely due to its improvement in human development indicators; its lowest score was in the category of Participation and Human Rights.

## 2014 SCORES

STATUS

**Not Free**FREEDOM RATING  
(1 = BEST, 7 = WORST)**6.0**CIVIL LIBERTIES  
(1 = BEST, 7 = WORST)**6**POLITICAL RIGHTS  
(1 = BEST, 7 = WORST)**6**

## POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES:

**Political Rights: 7 / 40 [Key]****A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12**

Ethiopia's Parliament is made up of a 108-seat upper

house, the House of Federation, and a 547-seat lower house, the House of People's Representatives. The lower house is filled through popular elections, while the upper chamber is selected by the state legislatures; members of both houses serve five-year terms. The lower house selects the prime minister, who holds most executive power, and the president, a largely ceremonial figure who serves up to two six-year terms. In October 2013, Mulatu Teshome, Ethiopia's ambassador to Turkey, was selected as Ethiopia's new president.

The 2010 parliamentary and regional elections were tightly controlled by the EPRDF. Voters were threatened with losing their jobs, homes, or government services if they did not turn out for the ruling party. Opposition meetings were broken up, and candidates were threatened and detained. Opposition-aligned parties saw their 160-seat presence in Parliament virtually disappear, with the EPRDF and its allies taking all but two of the 547 seats in the lower house. Hailemariam will remain prime minister until elections in 2015.

#### **B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16**

Shorn of their representation in Parliament and under pressure by the authorities, opponents of the EPRDF find it difficult to operate. Opposition parties held peaceful demonstrations in June 2013, the first to be allowed by the government since 2005. Later in the year, however, opposition parties—including the Blue Party and the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party—accused the government of arresting large groups of their members and holding them without charge.

Political parties are often ethnically based. The EPRDF coalition is comprised of four political parties representing several ethnic groups. The government tends to favor Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters, and the EPRDF is dominated by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front. While the 1995 constitution grants the right of secession to ethnically based states, the government acquired powers in 2003 to intervene in states' affairs on issues of public security.

#### **C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12**

All of Ethiopia's governance institutions are dominated by the EPRDF, which tightly controlled the succession process following the death of Meles in 2012.

Corruption remains a significant problem in Ethiopia. EPRDF officials reportedly receive preferential access to credit, land leases, and jobs. Petty corruption extends to lower level officials, who allegedly solicit bribes in return for processing documents. In 2013, the Ethiopian government attempted to demonstrate its commitment to fighting corruption after the release of a World Bank study the previous year that detailed corruption in the country. As part of the effort, the Federal Ethics & Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC) made a string of high-profile arrests of prominent government officials and businessmen throughout the year. In October, Hailemariam opened the conference of the National Anti-Corruption Coalition, outlining a national anticorruption strategy and urging other officials to support the initiative. Ethiopia ranked 111 out of 177

countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index.

## **Civil Liberties: 11 / 40**

### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16**

The media is dominated by state-owned broadcasters and government-oriented newspapers. One of the few independent papers in the capital, *Addis Neger*, closed in 2009, claiming harassment by the authorities. Privately owned papers tend to steer clear of political issues and have low circulations. In 2013, three news outlets were either banned or shut down indefinitely. A 2008 media law criminalizes defamation and allows prosecutors to seize material before publication in the name of national security. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Ethiopia had the second-highest number of jailed journalists in Africa after Eritrea as of December 2013. Restrictions on journalists perceived to be sympathetic to widespread protests by the Muslim community are particularly tight. In August 2013, Darsema Sori and Khalid Mohammed of Radio Bilal, which has covered the demonstrations, were arrested and held without charge.

Journalists reporting on opposition activities face serious harassment and the threat of prosecution under Ethiopia's sweeping 2009 Antiterrorism Proclamation. An estimated 11 journalists have been convicted under the law since 2011, three of whom remained in prison in 2013. Two additional journalists remain on trial under the law. In September 2013, Reeyot Alemu, a *Feteh* newspaper columnist serving a five-year sentence on terrorism charges at Kaliti prison, undertook a four-day hunger strike to protest visitation restrictions and threats of solitary confinement. Reeyot's health is said to have deteriorated significantly in prison. In July 2012, six journalists were convicted of terrorism. While five were convicted in absentia, the sixth, Eskinder Nega, received 18 years in prison. The judge said that he had consorted with the political group Ginbot 7, a designated terrorist entity in Ethiopia. The United States, the European Union, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed dismay at the verdicts. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention characterized Eskinder's detention as a violation of international law and recommended his "immediate release." He continued to publish from prison in 2013, appearing in both the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*. Both Eskinder and Reeyot's cases are being appealed to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights under the African Union.

Due to the risks of operating inside the country, many Ethiopian journalists work in exile. CPJ says Ethiopia has driven 49 journalists into exile in the past 5 years. Authorities use high-tech jamming equipment to filter and block news websites seen as pro-opposition. Legislation adopted in May 2012 criminalizes the use of telecommunications devices to transmit any "terrorizing message." Critics said the vaguely worded law also effectively banned the use of Skype and other voice-over-internet protocol services that cannot be closely monitored by the government. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), since 2010 the Ethiopian government has developed a robust and sophisticated

internet and mobile framework to monitor journalists and opposition groups, block access to unwanted websites, and collect evidence for prosecutions in terrorism and other trials.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but the government has increasingly harassed the Muslim community, which has grown to rival the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as the country's largest religious group. Muslim groups accuse the government of trying to impose the beliefs of an obscure Islamic sect, Al-Ahbash, at the expense of the dominant Sufi-influenced strain of Islam. Before his death, Meles accused the Muslim community of being a source of extremism, claiming it had links to Al-Qaeda.

Academic freedom is often restricted in Ethiopia. The government has accused universities of being pro-opposition and prohibits political activities on campuses. There have been reports of students being pressured into joining the EPRDF in order to secure places at universities. The Ministry of Education closely monitors and regulates official curricula, and the research, speech, and assembly of both professors and students is frequently restricted. In March 2013, authorities arrested Addis Ababa University student Manyazewal Eshetu for posting "unconfirmed information" after he wrote about government corruption on his Facebook page. Manyazewal was later released without charge.

The presence of the EPRDF at all levels of society inhibits free private discussion. Many people are wary of speaking against the government for fear of being overheard by party officials. The EPRDF maintains a network of paid informants, and opposition politicians have accused the government of tapping their telephones.

#### **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12**

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by the constitution but limited in practice. Organizers of large public meetings must request permission from the authorities 48 hours in advance. Applications by opposition groups are routinely denied. Ongoing peaceful demonstrations have been held by members of the Muslim community since December 2011 with violent responses from security forces. The protesters allege government interference in religious affairs and politically motivated selection of members of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council. Tens of thousands participated in demonstrations following Eid holiday prayers in August; the protesters were met with a heavy-handed police response that resulted in hundreds of arrests and an unconfirmed number of deaths. Twenty-nine demonstration leaders have been charged under the antiterrorism law with conspiracy and attempting to establish an Islamic state; their trial remains ongoing. Trial proceedings have been closed to the public, media, and the individuals' families. According to HRW, some defendants claimed that they have been restricted access to legal counsel. Though momentum has slowed, protests remain ongoing.

The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation restricts the activities of foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) by prohibiting work on political and human rights issues. Foreign NGOs are defined as groups receiving

more than 10 percent of their funding from abroad, a classification that includes most domestic organizations as well. NGOs have struggled to maintain operations as a result of the law, which also requires them to reregister with the authorities. According to Justice Ministry figures, there were 3,522 registered NGOs before the law was passed. Estimates of the number of NGOs since the passage of the law ranged from 1,500 to 1,700 as of the end of 2013. In 2010, the Human Rights Council (HRCO) and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA) had their bank accounts frozen for violating the rules on receiving foreign funds. An appeal against the ruling by the HRCO was rejected by the Supreme Court in October 2012. Both organizations have dramatically reduced their operations. As of 2013, HRCO shut down three-quarters of its offices and shed 85 percent of its staff, while the EWLA scaled down its staff by 70 percent.

Trade union rights are tightly restricted. Neither civil servants nor teachers have collective bargaining rights. All unions must be registered, and the government retains the authority to cancel registration. Two-thirds of union members belong to organizations affiliated with the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, which is under government influence. Independent unions face harassment, and trade union leaders are regularly imprisoned. There has not been a legal strike since 1993.

#### **F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16**

The judiciary is officially independent, but its judgments rarely deviate from government policy. The 2009 antiterrorism law gives great discretion to the security forces, allowing the detention of suspects for up to four months without charge. It was used in 2011 to detain more than 100 members of opposition parties; terrorist suspects were denied legal assistance while they awaited trial. In April 2013, nearly 30 individuals suspected of having links to Al-Qaeda and the Somali Islamist group Al-Shabaab were charged under the antiterrorism law. Conditions in Ethiopia's prisons are harsh, and detainees frequently report abuse. A HRW report released in October 2013 documented human rights violations in Addis Ababa's Maekelawi police station, including verbal and physical abuse, denial of basic needs, and torture.

Domestic NGOs estimated that there were up to 400 political prisoners by the end of 2012, though estimates vary significantly. In August 2013, Tesfahun Chemed, an engineer who had been sentenced to life in prison in 2010 for holding political views that dissented from the EPRDF, died in Kaliti prison. He had reportedly been tortured repeatedly, and human rights groups have called for an investigation into his death.

Repression of the Oromo and ethnic Somalis, and government attempts to co-opt their parties into subsidiaries of the EPRDF, have fueled nationalism in both the Oromia and Ogaden regions. Persistent claims that war crimes have been committed by government troops in the Ogaden area are difficult to verify, as independent media are barred from the region.

#### **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16**

Private business opportunities are limited by rigid state

control of economic life and the prevalence of state-owned enterprises. All land must be leased from the state. The government has evicted indigenous groups from various areas to make way for projects such as hydroelectric dams. It has also leased large tracts of land to foreign governments and investors for agricultural development in opaque deals. Up to 70,000 people have been forced to move from the western Gambella region, although the government denies the resettlement plans are connected to land investments. Journalists and international organizations have persistently alleged that the government has withheld development assistance from villages perceived as being unfriendly to the ruling party.

Women are relatively well represented in Parliament, holding 28 percent of seats and three ministerial posts. Legislation protects women's rights, but they are routinely violated in practice. Enforcement of the law against rape and domestic abuse is patchy, with cases routinely stalling in the courts. In December 2012, the government made progress against forced child labor, passing a National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor and updating its list of problematic occupations for children. Same-sex sexual activity is prohibited by law and punishable with imprisonment.

**Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

[Full Methodology](#)

[About us](#)

[Careers](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Credits](#)

[Sitio de Freedom House México en español](#)

[Freedom House Mexico Website \(in Spanish\)](#)

[Subscribe](#)